

Singular/Plural nouns

We use **singular verb forms** with:

- mass nouns: *butter, cheese, bread, air, gold, wood* etc. *There is some butter left in the fridge.*
- school subjects: *maths, geography, physics* etc. *Physics is my favourite subject at school.*
- games: *football, billiards, dominoes* etc. *Billiards is my favourite game.*
- diseases: *measles, mumps, flu* etc. *Measles is a terrible childhood disease.*
- some other nouns: *news, advice, information, money, furniture, hair, homework, rubbish, jewellery, luggage* etc. *The furniture in the room is quite old.*

We use **plural verb forms** with:

- objects consisting of two parts: **items of clothing** (*pyjamas, trousers, shorts* etc), **tools** (*scissors, pliers* etc), **instruments** (*binoculars, compasses* etc).
- group nouns: *family, team, police, staff* etc, when we mean the individuals that make up the group. However, we use singular verb forms when we refer to them as a unit. *My family have different ideas on certain issues.* (We mean the individual members of the family.) *Mary's family always spends Easter together.* (We refer to them as a unit.)

9

Underline the correct word.

- 1 How many children is/are there in your class?
- 2 Some people never do/does any exercise.
- 3 There is/are a pair of socks under the bed.
- 4 His new clothes was/were very expensive.
- 5 I can't find the stairs in this building. Where is/are they?
- 6 The police is/are looking for the criminal.
- 7 I want to cut some paper. Where is/are the scissors?
- 8 Your hair need/needs cutting.
- 9 Your pyjamas is/are on the bed.
- 10 The information you gave me was/were very helpful.
- 11 There was/were a lot of people at the cinema last night.
- 12 My shorts is/are made of silk.
- 13 His shoes is/are too small. He needs a new pair.
- 14 My parents is/are walking the dog at the moment.
- 15 These earrings was/were given to me by my grandmother.

6

Underline the correct word.

- 1 A: How many biscuits was/were there in the tin?
B: I don't know.
- 2 A: These trousers is/are too long.
B: You must have bought the wrong size.
- 3 A: My hair is/are a mess today.
B: Don't be silly. You look lovely.
- 4 A: I need some new socks.
B: There is/are a new pair in that bag for you.
- 5 A: What happened to that escaped criminal?
B: The police is/are still looking for him.
- 6 A: Did you see Steve at the party?
B: No. There was/were too many other people there.
- 7 A: Do you like my new shoes?
B: Oh yes. My shoes is/are very similar, actually.
- 8 A: I can't stand people who never do/does anything for themselves.
B: Nor can I. No one should depend totally on others.
- 9 A: My shorts is/are dirty.
B: Well, you'll have to wear a skirt.
- 10 A: The stairs in the cathedral was/were very steep.
B: Yes. I was exhausted when I reached the top.

7

Fill in **is** or **are**.

- 1 Be careful! Those scissors ...*are*... very sharp.
- 2 Maths John's favourite subject at school.
- 3 The police investigating the crime.
- 4 These trousers too big for me.
- 5 The stairs in my house made of wood.
- 6 His new furniture very modern.
- 7 The weather going to be bad this weekend.
- 8 My advice that you get a new job.
- 9 His new clothes very fashionable.
- 10 The team all training hard for Saturday's match.
- 11 The money in the jar for this week's shopping.
- 12 My pyjamas not on my bed. Where they?
- 13 Mumps a childhood disease.
- 14 My luggage in the car already.
- 15 Your hair very long again.
- 16 Tom's gloves made of soft leather.
- 17 The class all working on a project together.
- 18 Athletics my favourite sport.
- 19 My shoes too small for me now.

Sometimes we use a *plural* noun for one thing that has two parts. For example:



trousers (*two legs*)
also jeans/tights/shorts/pants



pyjamas
(*top and bottom*)



glasses



binoculars



scissors

These words are plural, so they take a plural verb:

My trousers **are** too long. (*not my trousers is*)

You can also use **a pair of** + these words:

Those are nice jeans. *or* That's a nice **pair of** jeans. (*not a nice jeans*)
 I need **some** new glasses. *or* I need **a new pair of** glasses.

Some nouns end in **-ics**, but are not usually plural. For example:

athletics **economics** **electronics** **gymnastics**

maths (= mathematics) **physics** **politics**

Gymnastics **is** my favourite sport. (*not Gymnastics are*)

News is not plural (see Unit 70B):

What time **is** the news on TV? (*not are the news*)

Some words ending in **-s** can be singular or plural. For example:

means **a means** of transport **many means** of transport

series **a television series** **two television series**

species **a species** of bird **200 species** of bird

Some singular nouns are often used with a plural verb. For example:

audience **committee** **company** **family** **firm** **government** **staff** **team**

These nouns are all groups of people. We often think of them as a number of people (= *they*), not as one thing (= *it*). So we often use a plural verb:

The government (= *they*) **have decided** to increase taxes.
 The staff at the company (= *they*) **are** not happy with **their** working conditions.

In the same way, we often use a plural verb after the name of a sports team or a company:

Italy **are** playing Brazil next Sunday (in a football match).
 Shell **have** increased the price of petrol.

A singular verb (**The government wants** ... / **Shell has** ... etc.) is also possible.

We use a plural verb with **police**:

The police **are** investigating the crime, but **haven't** arrested anyone yet.
(*not The police is ... hasn't*)

Note that we say **a police officer** / **a policeman** / **a policewoman** (*not a police*).

We do not often use the plural of **person** ('persons'). We normally use **people** (a *plural* word):

He's a nice **person**. *but* They are nice **people**. (*not nice persons*)
 Many people **don't** have enough to eat. (*not Many people doesn't*)

We think of a sum of money, a period of time, a distance etc. as *one* thing. So we use a singular verb:

Fifty thousand pounds (= *it*) **was** stolen in the robbery. (*not were stolen*)
 Three years (= *it*) **is** a long time to be without a job. (*not Three years are*)
 Two miles **isn't** very far to walk.

79.1 Complete each sentence using a word from Sections A or B. Sometimes you need a or some.

- 1 My eyesight isn't very good. I need glasses.
- 2 A species is a group of animals or plants that have the same characteristics.
- 3 Footballers don't wear trousers when they play. They wear trousers.
- 4 The bicycle is transport of transport.
- 5 The bicycle and the car are transport of transport.
- 6 I want to cut this piece of material. I need a piece of material.
- 7 A friend of mine is writing articles for the local newspaper.
- 8 There are a lot of American TV programmes shown on TV in Britain.
- 9 While we were out walking, we saw many different types of bird.

79.2 In each example the words on the left are connected with an activity (for example, a sport or an academic subject). Write the name of the activity. The beginning of the word is given.

1 calculate	algebra	equation	<u>mathematics</u>
2 government	election	minister	<u>p</u>
3 finance	trade	employment	<u>e</u>
4 running	jumping	throwing	<u>a</u>
5 light	heat	gravity	<u>ph</u>
6 exercises	somersault	parallel bars	<u>gy</u>
7 processor	silicon chip	gigabyte	<u>el</u>

79.3 Choose the correct form of the verb, singular or plural. In two sentences either the singular or plural verb is possible.

- 1 Gymnastics is / are my favourite sport. (is is correct)
- 2 The trousers you bought for me doesn't / don't fit me.
- 3 The police want / wants to interview two men about the robbery last week.
- 4 Physics was / were my best subject at school.
- 5 Can I borrow your scissors? Mine isn't / aren't sharp enough.
- 6 It's a nice place to visit. The people is / are very friendly.
- 7 Fortunately the news wasn't / weren't as bad as we expected.
- 8 Where does / do your family live?
- 9 I can't find my binoculars. Do you know where it is / they are?
- 10 Does / Do the police know how the accident happened?
- 11 Germany is / are playing Spain tomorrow night, but it's not on TV.
- 12 Most people enjoy / enjoys music.

79.4 Most of these sentences are wrong. Correct them where necessary.

- 1 Three years are a long time to be without a job.
- 2 The government have decided to increase taxes.
- 3 Susan was wearing a black jeans.
- 4 I don't like hot weather. Thirty degrees is too hot for me.
- 5 I like Martin and Jane. They're very nice persons.
- 6 Ten pounds aren't enough. I need more money than that.
- 7 I'm going to buy a new pyjama.
- 8 The committee haven't made a decision yet.
- 9 There was a police directing traffic in the street.
- 10 What is the police going to do?
- 11 This scissors isn't very sharp.
- 12 Four days isn't enough for a good holiday.

Three years is a long time
OK. (has decided is also correct)